MY SILENCE

--R.K. Singh

MY SILENCE

1974-1984

By

R.K. SINGH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the editors/publishers of the following journals in which some of the poems in this collection were first published in their revised or pre-revised form: Asparagus (Hyderabad), The Call Beyond (New Delhi), The Commonwealth Quarterly (Mysore), ELT Forum Journal of English Studies (Tellicherry), Indian and Foreign Review (New Delhi), Indian Literature (New Delhi), The Journal of Indian Writing in English (Gulbarga), Poet (Madras), Poesie (Berhampur), Poetry Time (Berhampur), Samvedana (Mangalore), Skylark (Aligarh), The Third Eye (Calcutta), Unilit (Secunderabad), University Today (New Delhi), Youth Age (Pondicherry), and/or included in the following anthologies:

New Dimensions in Indo-English Poetry (1980), Rising Columns: Some Indian Poets in English (1981), Modern Trends in Indo-Anglian Poetry (1982), Prevalent Aspects in Indian English Poetry (1983-84), and Indo-Australian Flowers (1984).

I am also grateful to my poet-professor friend Dr Lyle Glazier of Bennington, Vermont, whose advice and guidance changed the texture of a large number of poems included here.

R.K. SINGH

FOREWORD

Emerson has said: “It is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem—a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or animal it has an architecture of its own.” Denise Levertov is more explicit—“Intellect and sensuous lead to syllable which has intrinsic meaning but has not rhythm. It is when emotion and feeling influence the operation of process that were led to the phrase, the rhythmic , emotive grouping of syllables.” Conrad believed that we are in this life as in a dream, and the secret is to immerse oneself in the destructive element and let the deep sea keep you up. As such we witness in modern poets their struggle to convert materials that are dumb and stammering in everydayness into eloquent media.

To the poet, the world is an extension of himself, his flesh, his blood, his bones. Poetical modernity is expressing its freedom of form, of structure, of imagery and idea. Twilight poets write of a fragile world, covered with mysticism and eerie shadows.

Dr Singh has chosen his own path—combining the riches of tradition with scintillating modernity. He is very helpful to the reader when he says: “The psychological and aesthetic tension of each poem, which is an independent experience shaped by an awareness wrapped in the real-fictional duality of the poet, rests on the bilateral relation between its personae and the readers, and I hold that as a creator, the poet should allow his readers to re-create the material according to their own intellectual potency, taste and sensibility and himself refrain from making any comments or suggestions on his poems. Even giving a title to the poem is to interfere with the readers’ freedom of imagination. As such the poems in this collection have no titles: there is only first-line table of contents.”

He startles us when he sings:

"is a woman
concrete, personal, delightful
greater than all"

Each night in the island of his little bed he enters, he senses: "Sex like Octopus."

He sees the mountain as a green cemetery—hiding men and ages:

"I wanted to touch a sun
vanished before my hands
became titan to reach
the horizon"

And to him a poem:

"elusive like a butterfly
is the dynamics
of a culture"

and "it incorporates multiplicity of modern man/fluid, mobile/multicultural/manipulating matrix of tongues/ and patterns of languages/into a stable whole/of self awareness."

In his remarkable book on SAVITRI—A Spiritual Epic, Dr Singh writes: "Poets are always searching for words that sink deep into the living texture of a culture." And, Dr Lyle Glazier of Bennington, Vermont, USA has rightly said: "R.K. Singh writes with the directness of an overheard whisper, or a wind through trees, a ripple in a stream, or a cry in the street after dark."

1st Jan 1985 **Krishna Srinivas**

MY SILENCE

1

She is the tree
green and wide
abundantly dressed
overflowing
spreading her sleeves
blesses all
in her cool shade
solitude teems
with breezy songs
I feel
nearer God

2

That autumn tree
from this window
looks like a young woman
naked
exciting birds
to come
kiss and play
tomorrow
when spring will return
she will be too lovely
to touch

3

I feel her hyaline influx
in my deep love leaps
from the soul with subtle glows
her breath runs through my veins:
this vassal of the flesh blushes
as I drink the infinite in her

4

I clasp your hands
and feel the blood
running savagely
through your arteries
in tulip silence

5

Is it the perfume
or your body
that makes the night
drunken?

your lush lips
ripple fire
in beautiful silence

your fragrance radiates
flowers and water

can I seek
my voice
in your breasts?

6

Blind
I see her beauty
deaf
I hear her melody
ignorant
I partake of her knowledge
poor
I share her wealth
in-drawn
her vision reigns my heart

yet the darkness of dust
veils my being
I don’t understand
the hidden words

though I sit
under her tree of love
she’s still away from me
just one pace
if I could take
I enter
the pavilion of eternity

7

The best poetry
is a woman
concrete, personal, delightful
greater than all

8

What is
this light
without rays
shining
in your eyes?

9

She is declared a mental case
her legs are shackled tight
in the street she snails up and down

naked without food
she freezes in December
near the drain curls up

unnoticed by pavement dwellers
building a bonfire of twigs, papers
cast-off shoes and rags

under the bridge sipping tea
I hear the bell tolling at Rajghat
pilgrims make haste to catch train

10

She stands between two parched trees like a sea of beauty
and looks at passing fishermen in the afternoon
her eyes are fish yet no one cares
the riotous leaves drop down and rest
before the flame cools she sees
against the hilly ups and downs her broken bangles
and hides a weeping rose in her white saree

11

The little heifer eats in
landscape of violence lies
on grass that is a grave

wild beasts and bulls surround

who’ll hear her agony when
gods are begotten from their sperms?

12

To express sex
a crowd is convenient in the bus
during the Puja he rubs hard
his cock against the ladies' bottoms
before turning wild gets down
at Sabuj Samaj to search
a new outlet in the Pandal
Durga's eyes are too hazed to see
the dark desires of youth
crowding in the name of religion
puja, culture, and tradition
--all a national wastage—
while the cowards fear the coming
closer of boys and girls
in freedom
the government deploys
criminals actively
pushing and pressing
to keep the law and order, who bothers
their rape and adultery in the crowd?

13

He hands coins
just to look at
the tanned fronts
behind the little holes
of her only saree perhaps
the urge is to tear
the wrap that hides
the little thing but
he’s too timid to uncoop
his heart trapped
in her sandal arc

14

While I was petting and necking
lying over her body
she was calculating whether
she could afford a new saree
from what I would pay her
tonight

15

Spring’s full youth
he unbuttons
her printed skirt
on red cushion
feels autumn
dropping down
the leaves of year
at the centre incline
like a twisted stem
at the end
wind dries up
a few more prints

16

Squatted in sun
she was cleaning
white and yellow germs
festering her womb
still she thanked
she was alive

17

She mysteriously conceals
all her passions
looking straight pretends
she hasn’t seen me

18

In the forest of her body
and steeps of her breasts
is the highwayman
I saw escaping
the moon
over stream last night

19

Each night in the island
of my little bed I enter
sensing sex like octopus
squeeze her with all my fingers

to bridge the gap
between dream and vision
set sail, and shipwrecked
unfree the tensions

in monsoony mist
search door in the wall or
gather diaspora of continents
in a hidden landscape

as a wild mystic explore
her privates with handgun
and land on fresh islands
each night in my little bed

20

When I asked
to open her secret
she showed me thumb

I thought
she would return
love for love

21

Looking like reality this life
is nothing but show
don’t fall in its traps

22

Sometimes in winter
in the snow of your body
there simmered a heat

in a vivacious spring
fell a sweet calamity
as love began to jell

don’t you remember
my dream’s river stirred
and the nemesis in summer?

wedged between me and you
was jinx that rains
to remind of age and passion

the growing jungles and the blues
empaling warmth and vigour
an end we always detest

23

The rising smoke
is mysterious
like woman:
I see
the shade
of a snake

24

Like an autumn tree
curving, leaning
waving, drooping
nude, mysterious
bites into consciousness
through dark odyssey
her love-hate is
the primal snake

25

Every sleeping guy
gets up
at the last kick
of a waking tart

26

Melting chrysanthemum
silent chromosomes
restless energy
stones in wood
where is the release?

27

Swelled by humidity
the mountain is a green cemetery
hiding men and ages
people may not believe in the valley
everyone is walking I hear
death echoing in tunnels
dark or grey, black or green
itching like a whore
whose hand has clutched everything
every song is a lament
conspiring with rains, winter, summer
autumn, storm, wind, sun, moon
it’s hardened , cruel, a green stone
nourishing the dirge
we crown death

28

The limy layers on their faces
and the fidgeting fingers in ashes
not far from the kitchen yard
they pick out the used up coal
to burn against their poverty
cook tomorrow’s food

29

I sweat my hours in the burrows
dust clouds the still days

roasting their calligraphy
I burn in the deadly gorge

what if the stains pursue
I drink sulphur on the road

30

Banares
seems holier at night
mating dogs and bitches
join pundits
in the name of religion
their meditation
adds noise
no one will admit
I am no god
if it doesn’t nettle
the divine rest
it kills my peace

31

The river flows through woods
in Banares for centuries
down this terrace
washes ills and hides sins
in her ripples reflects
the eternity they love
the myth of heaven and salvation
each morning my father repeats
celestial history while his son
breaks off the golden bough
and acts Rex Nemorensis
without fighting the priest

32

Policemen roam about the roads
at night goblins terrify
the poor cart-driver
with long claws
rob the travellers
detect in every man
a thief or pickpocket
arrest the innocent
beat recklessly
turn criminal
in uniform
enslave law and liberty
while the watch-dogs sleep
in two houses
they hum around
chewing tobacco

33

God alone knows
what clay they are made of
but I have seen
travelling in Lucknow
bus drivers are annoyed
by conductors' whim

34

There’s no penalty
when dogs foul
side-walks, parks
and streets, but if
a man pisses or spits
in a corner
they fine 100 pounds

35

They wanted to write
slogans to transform
their follies into autumn

banners at the gate
flutter between leaves
scratching winter eruptions

they monitor the dead woods
and overlook what goes on
right under their nose

in the name of liberty
take greater liberties
to improve posture of their days

36

The consort of the Earth-Mother
without buttocks our little primate
weeping for others and never for himself
kills with kindness his own children
very few worshippers would realize
whether he wears purple robes or golden sandals
the vermillion-daubed god hides *simia dei*
that mounts on a goat and carries an owl
sucking the monkey with his antics
of love and justice he plays
the lamb, the lion, the pig, and the ape
and proves his virility in the politics
of monkey, cow, and snake

37

Because he was intelligent
and his talent wrecked his life
he wants his son to grow
ignorant and stupid
that he enjoys a quiet life
by becoming a cabinet minister

38

They repeat the blunders
out of ignorance
or kindness

to prove wisdom
bureaucrats
join hands with

politicians and journalists
who appear
in mating season

like dogs in
0ctober and November
and perpetuate the blur

around the hole
to stand in the queue
of decaying ancestors

39

The watery weather
continues to shatter
the mortal shell

one by one
washes the paints
that hide the face

40

Shadows spring from night
whispering darkness fog the streetlight
and I walk alone against the wind

unseen and unheard strangers glide
into dreams mind creates lightless circles
one after another longings

spin their wheels outside me
miracles blind faith inside drugged genes
create human ghouls droning out

psalms in tenebrous void
my lulling spirit looks for Shamash
to light the woodening house

41

Icy winds howl at the Ganges
cold stars cover the winter sky
at the *alao* they shed silence of agonies

hiding hands in sleeves I walk
my shadows circling back to the beginning
now lost in the drain that was river

42

The works and days' weariness
prolong inside, turn out a smile
rescind the stitches in the sky

half-asleep hysterical night
hoses down the gutters without fuss
I collapse on the open-thighed creek

and feel the whole city in the glen
peel off the illusory flesh-warmth until
the rosy-fingered dawn messes around

43

I wanted to touch a sun
vanished before my hands
became titan to reach
the horizon

44

I see boats sinking and life
bewitched by sufferings, here
is *M* in both palms
still I am no Picasso

45

The snake has slipped out
leaving a dark paint over the ground
shade lingers to remind
the slant moon I held in dark

46

Draped in white the night
embraces ripples
down the terrace the course
defies my gaze
the moon falls into pieces
down my son’s cheeks

47

Tonight the icy wind blows
and a huge log (of an uprooted tree)
barely smoulders to warm up
the nameless children of footpaths

I am born in freezing December
and I know well what warmth means
to a ferryman rowing across the river
in the silence of twilight

48

Watching the waves
up and down
I stand
like an island
shielding chaos
I hear the serenade
and live my joy

49

There is altar and fire
but what is this rite
spirits tope and announce
the burial of heaven?

50

Evening’s slow pace
against leafless trees
is within me

a whale grows
against dull sea
stars fall mute

dark fingers harpoon
my name through tunnel
night chimes shallow

51

The bones
with curves
kinks and hollow

the true
physicalness

we love
worm-eaten reality

now floats
on river's breast

wrapped in white
moving toward
emptiness

52

Waiting for the light to go out
the night peeps in
through the window
and time passes
poem by poem

53

The withered leaves
blown away in autumn
come again with the tired rains

the season confers
through the soft grey clouds
the growing freshness on naked trees

54

Your vacant eyes
reveal this city:
dim, absent-minded, humid
orchestrating bronchial noises
by night ‘quakes in the face
swash my deep peace

in cells naked gods nudge
borrowed girls with wealth
uncreate their seeds
for hurried happiness
boats toss about on
prostituting men and women

55

There is something in the air
the tree tops announce
but I walk in sleep

candied ideas
shine like light
and the third day ends

56

Walking along the waterfront
I've watched the dark waves
with rope in thousand hands
to bind the dragon

my smoke-drenched spirit
and black patches remind
my eating yams raw
and the dragon fleeing

57

It rises like a flame
burns in silence
straight, without wavering
light in peace
radiates love:
I fish I in me
the stream and ocean merge

58

The expanding rings of the sun
cobweb my being and things
all around cluster from dawn to dusk
the myth repeats itself

the leaping light from my depths
is the halo round the paper-god's head
stirring the radiance and soul and all
it's the equation of live, die and be

but the confounding solitude at this hour
conspires to hallow its sombre sight
my feelings mirror in the absolute
of blind prayers and short visions

59

Death comes from the south
like cool pleasant wind
and cheats the guard with spear

lest the heat burn the universe
the mare is hidden in water
and flames rise in flood

what if my hair falls
Shiva is planted deep
and the serpent is eternal

60

There is no rest
even after death
body is cut open
to detect
the cause of death
then burnt to ashes
to crown formality

61

Rooted in twilight, dreaming
pruning spring thoughts
a partitioned façade

this empty cell of time
is me weaving heat
in unholy solitude

climbing rickety heights
booze or castor oil sex
to suspend creation

62

I dance the magic
and ritual of the moon
with darkness like rock

on the island in me
Uhuru stands like lingam
pink mood turns violet

63

Love is
to wash your hand
before touching the penis
in obeisance to lingam
the climax of creation

love is
to gather molecules
of happiness in flesh
and merge in rapture
to propitiate Shiva

64

The sangam of Ganga and Yamuna
is a homosexual union
charming but sterile

my friend knows well
the road to heaven doesn't go
through snaky waters

65

From the sea of days and years
I gather white sand
drifted on the beach
in the shells waves bring
I search my name

like a timeless thought
from first to last it remains
revolving like the earth
the sun in me rises and sets
and I dance my silence on the ocean floor

66

I wake in the morning to the tiring screams
then out of the bed and away from wife
get lost in the sickening routine
in Dhanbad the dark worries
    --no light, no water
    no sugar, no oil
    his notes and bickerings
    and tensions and allergies
    and threats and coercions
    and academic conspiracies—
create nightmares between 6 and 10
the fears are real with curses on lips

I fight with the devils desiring
to procreate christians
--fill the pits they dig all day
or stamp on evils till evil ends—
while others watch from behind the curtain
maybe, laugh at my massacring the time
or the sold-out dons despise
my odd politics or opposite look
at ISM they feed on snakes
and shrink and shrivel everyday
the self-waste and wars and cries
reduce man to nought I see
every moment they muck in mocks
and my own shoes pinch when I walk

67

It is the same house
the same alcove
I shed my loneliness in
reading prayers and psalms
chanting mantras in fumes

it is the same room
the same cement rack
crowded with earthen idols
of Ganesh and Lakshmi
worshipped last Diwali

it is the same altar
the same paper-Kali
framed in glass and
dusted with sindoor
my wife puts each day

it is the same floor
the same four walls
god watched us sweeping
and purifying with *dhoopam*
each evening before bed

it is the same prayers
the same pleasures
we rejoice with impulse
they savour with sacrilege
our rituals of lust and labour

it is the same incommunicado
the same swearing by coal
in the dark alley
nothing had changed

and nothing changes

68

In the eyes of my little son
I saw Kali dancing that day
without words moving flames
built the cross I loved
and his falling tears drove me
to the little psalms
I read long long ago

he wanted me to go back
to the yearning loneliness
and cried: “Papa, *dua*, pray”

perforced I closed my eyes to escape
the thorns of stained hours but
never knew he had reached
the twilight ocean of love

it was a strange white sun
softly closing on me like an angel
my son stood on his little legs
by Christ and Mohammad, and Kali
kissed us with her bloody lips
and Shiva guided my way through silence
homeward I returned a changed man

69

Move your oars faster, O boatman
I must rush to the bank
before the sun dies
and search my son
lost from the sacred precincts

move your oars faster, O boatman
I must catch the bird
before it flees in the blue
and I hear the dusk
empty in monotone

move your oars faster, O boatman
I must reach my home
before the snakes of the river shroud my bed
and my being is questioned
by the silence of the watery night

70

After burning heat of May
I'd thought with rains
will come God's grace
gentle like new grass

but before little leaves from
cracks of the walls smiled
goats trampled the flower-beds
and grazed away all our dreams

71

The little paper boats
drift on the surface
without concern
the wind blows

my little son plays
unconcerned with the world
of drifting waters
we live in day and night

72

It’s utter helplessness
true, but to survive
one must be tamed

73

This moment
visits the dark
alleys of my body

as a guest sleeps
like my son
in my lap

74

The waves in me rise
like thousand-hooded snakes
strike the shores:

the rock stands undisturbed
the shores don’t move
the sea returns

75

There is a wave
which never reached
the shore:

it only pushed
the waves ahead
and broke

76

I prune my thoughts
to write well
to be simply understood

I don’t want
to outwit my readers
I am no celebrity

but they don’t want me
to grow like a tree
spreading branches

they appoint a gardener
to prune my limits:
my shades are uncomfortable

77

A poem
elusive like a butterfly
is the dynamics
of a culture
a process of exchange
a cultural artifact
fascinating
stimulating
reshaping
reader and creator
it incorporates
multiplicity
of modern man
fluid, mobile
multicultural
manipulating
matrix of tongues
and patterns of languages
into a stable whole
of self awareness

78

Exploring its own limits
the form manipulates relationship
between consciousness and self-consciousness
as in film flickering shadows
turn traditional metaphors
into contemporary realities
(or, separate art from life
in its quest for modernity)
inviting audience to reflect
across cultures and countries
proffering society's vision
of itself for itself
manifesting common humanity

79

What am I digging
in the graveyard
of memory?
a handful of images
to create a new myth?
or some space
to bury my being
with orisons
and burn every tomb?
or seal
the faint flame
that used to burn
within?
the long darkness
in the skull
is twice terrible
than life
I can’t weave
gaudy mess
of dreams any more

80

A poet’s simplicity
is misunderstood
so I keep quiet
but what if
my silence
is misunderstood?

Copyright: Ram Krishna Singh

The collection, first published under the World Poets Series by Poets Press India, Madras (Chennai) in 1985 and now out of print, appears in *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems* by R.K.Singh (published by Yking Books, Jaipur, 2010).